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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ANAMBRA GUBERNATORIAL RACE OFF TO ROCKY START

SUMMARY

11. (SBU) Judicial and electoral commission rulings on the disputed People's Democratic Party (PDP) nomination process have fueled confusion and tension in the February 2010 race for Governor of Anambra State. Political temperatures rose further with the reported kidnapping of the father of the former Governor of the Central Bank and putative PDP candidate, while the PDP candidate from the annulled 2007 election continues to urge the courts to declare him "governor in waiting." In many ways, Anambra is a political bellwether for Nigeria, but the omens for a credible election look grim. Thus far, INEC has done nothing there to redeem its shattered nationwide reputation. Meanwhile, the Anambra High Court has done a fairly good job of turning down the variety of attempts to rig the process. END SUMMARY.

THE ANAMBRA DRAMA

12. (SBU) On October 23, a Federal High Court in Abuja rejected the People's Democratic Party (PDP) designation of former Central Bank Governor Charles Soludo as its candidate for Governor in the February 2010 elections. The ruling forced the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to declare that it had barred Soludo's candidacy, while the Anambra State High Court ruled that INEC could not remove Soludo's name until higher courts (Court of Appeals) ruled on an appeal by his legal team.

13. (SBU) The Anambra State INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner Rowland Uwa told Political Specialist October 27 that INEC's decision to bar Soludo complied "strictly" with the October 23 ruling by the Federal High Court in Abuja on an internal PDP dispute arising from "inconclusive PDP primaries." He confirmed four additional litigations involving Soludo's candidacy. Uwa described the Anambra political situation as "precarious," adding that "it is important that INEC respects court orders to avoid accusations of bias by any of the parties or governorship candidates." Uwa expressed confidence that INEC would reinstate Soludo should the Federal High Court in Abuja or another higher court rescind the order, but described Soludo's selection as an "imposition" since neither the Anambra PDP executives nor the party rank and file participated in his selection. Similarly, Anambra State PDP Publicity Secretary Afam Ilunoh insisted that Soludo's selection ran contrary to the party's constitution, which required selection of party candidates through primaries.

LOSING CANDIDATE PERSISTS IN APPEALS

14. (SBU) Andy Uba, the PDP candidate who claimed to have won the 2007 Anambra gubernatorial election later annulled by the Supreme Court continued his attempts to convince the courts that he merited status as "governor in waiting." Incumbent governor Peter Obi of the ANPP had taken office in 2006 after successfully waging a three-year battle to overturn INEC's original declaration of still another PDP candidate as the victor against him in 2003. Obi later won a second legal victory when the Supreme Court ruled that his four-year tenure had started from the time he assumed office in 2006, annulling the 2007 election in which Uba had participated.

15. (SBU) The Chairperson of a PDP faction loyal to Andy Uba, Chief Bright Nebedum, expressed optimism to Political Specialist October QBright Nebedum, expressed optimism to Political Specialist October 27 that the courts would declare Uba as the successor to Governor Peter Obi, obviating the need for gubernatorial elections in February 2010. Nebedum, who opposed Soludo's candidacy, remarked that Soludo's legal difficulties stemmed from an "injustice meted out by those who think the PDP is their birthright."

GANG KIDNAPS SOLUDO'S FATHER

16. (SBU) On October 27, a five-man gang stormed Soludo's family home in Isafia and kidnapped his 79-year-old father, according to press reports. The reported kidnapping occurred on the same day that 4,000 anti-Soludo protesters from 21 local councils stormed the state capital to protest the "imposition" of Soludo's candidacy by Abuja PDP heavyweights. Police invited Andy Uba's brother Chris

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for questioning on his possible role in the kidnapping.

COMMENT

17. (SBU) Anambra is a political bellwether for Eastern Nigeria. It is the region's most populous state, the hub of major commercial towns like Onitsha, Nnewi and Akwa, and it is the home of prominent citizens like Nigeria's first president, Nnamdi Azikwe, former Biafra leader and ex-presidential candidate Emeka Ojukwu, former Vice President and current PDP First Chairperson Alex Ekweme, and renowned writer Chinua Achebe. The stakes are high in Anambra, in part because it is the last statewide chance for the federal government to show before the 2011 presidential poll that it can deliver a credible electoral process. Thus far, the omens in Anambra look grim: voter registration last month was marred by reported abuses, the nationally dominant PDP is bitterly divided, the courts are already involved as arbiters, and the father of a key PDP figure was brazenly kidnapped. Thus far, INEC has done nothing in Anambra to redeem its shattered nationwide reputation. END
COMMENT.

18. (U) Embassy and ConGen Lagos collaborated on this telegram.

SANDERS